

Beacon Cinema Opens in Pittsfield

By Tammy Daniels

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PITTSFIELD, Mass. — The smell of movie popcorn is wafting along North Street again.

The Beacon Cinema premiered on Friday morning with the clipping of a strand of 35 millimeter film — opening the doors to the high-tech, all-digital theater while at the same time symbolically cutting ties to an obsolete past.

The \$23 million project in the historic Kinnell-Kresge building has been **years in production** with a cast of hundreds and a spliced-together financing structure of public and private investment that developer Richard Stanley's compared to "The Perils of Pauline."



Eugene Mamut tries out the stadium seating in the new Beacon Cinema.

"My passion is downtown development. I love old architecture, I love the downtown and the hustle and bustle. I guess I'm basically still a New Yorker, a Manhattanite, at heart," said Stanley, as well-wishers made their way through one of the six brand-new theaters ("It's got that new car smell," remarked David Rooney, president of the Berkshire Economic Development Corp.) and offered their congratulations. "Seeing people on the street, it feels like life."

Local officials are hoping the Beacon brings that hustle and bustle back to North Street.

"That is what this theater is all about," said Mayor James M. Ruberto, the project's biggest booster. "It is the crown jewel of the revitalization of downtown."

The vitality was on view Thursday night for the Beacon's sneak preview: A simultaneous midnight showing on six screens of the blockbuster "The Twilight Saga: New Moon." The block party, run in conjunction with Third Thursday, filled the street and the theater. All 850 seats were sold the day before the opening.

"Seeing people on the street [last night]. It makes these gorgeous old buildings have life," said Stanley. "And that gave me a real thrill."

It was a bit of serendipity (the kind that moves the plot along) that "New



"Moon" would happen to **open the same day** as the Beacon. It was only last month that Allegrone Construction informed Stanley that the project would **come in a month early and on budget**.

"That piece of happenstance allowed us to launch it and get the buzz going," said Stanley, who also owns the Triplex in Great Barrington.

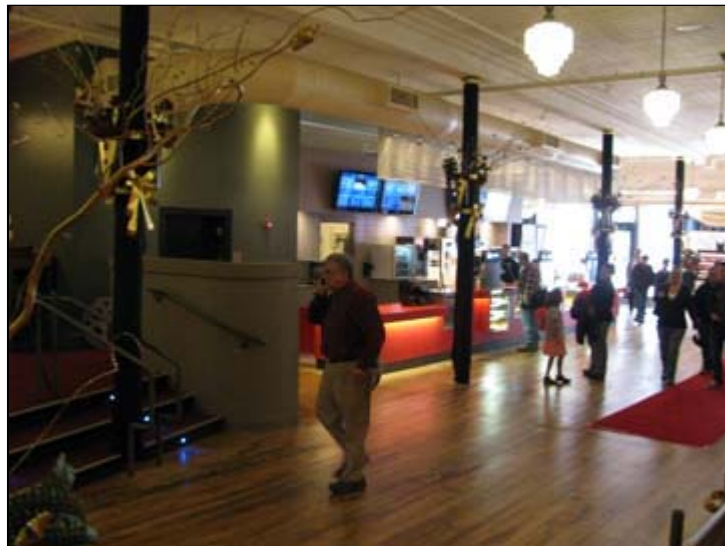
There was a lighter crowd on Friday morning waiting for that piece of film to be cut, but eager nonetheless to take a quick tour of the new facility,

which boasts the only escalator in Berkshire County and offers beer and wine in limited theaters.

The high-tech theaters (including several 3-D) occupy a rebuilt section was once used for storage. In the front section, the ceilings, walls, floors and windows — along with the unique white-tile exterior — have been restored to their former beauty and will be used for retail, office and restaurant space.

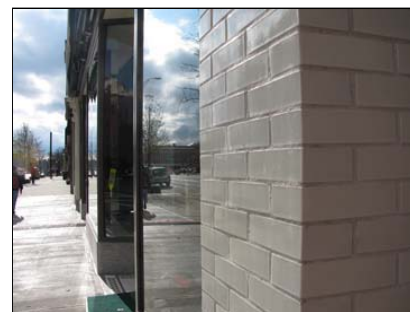
For nearly 20 years, the only movie theater in Pittsfield has been the Little Cinema at the Berkshire Museum. Residents have been going to Regal Cinemas at the Berkshire Mall or the Triplex for first-run Hollywood movies.

"This is what Pittsfield needs, it is going to get people downtown," said state Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox. "This is going to be the biggest economic impact that Pittsfield's seen in our lifetime ... I really believe that."



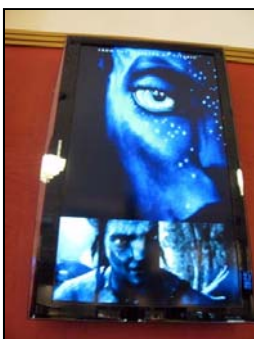
Eugene Mamut of Lee was among those trying out the stadium seating. The Oscar-winning special-effects creator said he believed the theater opening would be good for downtown, and for the residents of his investment properties off South Street.

The floors, ceiling, lights and exterior were restored.



"I don't want to get up," he said, leaning back in the deep plush red seat.

Beacon manager John Valente, who's run the Triplex for eight years, said the lengthy process was a good thing. Over the years, the Triplex has been able to experiment with the Berkshire Film Festival, independent films and other activities that may be replicated to some extent in Pittsfield.



The Beacon has digital movie posters and the county's only escalator.

"I'm actually glad it did [take that long] because it gave us the experience we needed and allowed the technology to catch up, so we could open this place with the best equipment on the market today," he said. "If we'd done this a few years ago, we would have had some theaters in film, some theaters in digital ... it would have been a mish-mosh."

It was the lost sense of community that brought the New Yorker to Berkshires. "I found my sense of community and I think when you come to this theater, I think you will, too."

Will they come? Well, they were already coming in for the afternoon shows, including Pittsfielders Brianna McLaughlin and Jesicca Lawson, with a couple friends. They'd missed the midnight showing of "New Moon" so were heading to a matinee.

"We're thrilled. We're within walking distance," said Lawson. "There's really nothing to do on North Street."

McLaughlin was more direct: "No more mall."

iBerkshires has added the Beacon Cinema to its [movie listings](#).

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